

Message Text

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SUBJECT: INTSUM 294 - APRIL 13, 1977

1. LEBANON. THERE HAS BEEN NO SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTHERN LEBANON. LITTLE GROUND ACTION WAS NOTED, BUT BOTH CHRISTIAN AND PALESTINIAN FORCES CONTINUED THEIR ARTILLERY BOMBARDMENTS. THE CHRISTIANS STILL HOLD MARJAYOUN, WHILE THERE ARE YET NO SIGNS THAT THE PALESTINIANS INTEND TO OPEN A SERIOUS GROUND OPERATION AIMED AT CAPTURING THE TOWN. EMBASSY BEIRUT REPORTS THAT A CEASEFIRE IS WIDELY EXPECTED SOON.

2. OUR DEFENSE ATTACHE WAS TOLD BY VICTOR KHOURY, THE NEW LEBANESE ARMY COMMANDER, ON APRIL 11 THAT HE HOPES TO FIELD A LEBANESE FORCE--COMPOSED CHIEFLY OF THE SYRIAN-SPONSORED SAIQA--IN THE SOUTH WITHIN TWO

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WEEKS. IT SEEMS OTHERWISE CLEAR THAT HE COULD NOT MUSTER A COMPARABLE FORCE FROM AMONG THE REMNANTS OF WHAT WAS ONCE THE REGULAR LEBANESE ARMY.

3. A REPORT THAT PIERRE GEMAYEL AND HIS SON BASHIR, WHO COMMANDS THE PHALANGE MILITARY ELEMENTS, PLAN TO GO TO DAMASCUS FOR TALKS WITH SYRIAN LEADERS ON

APRIL 14 IS BEING INTERPRETED IN LOCAL BEIRUT CIRCLES AS AN INDICATION OF CHRISTIAN DEFEATISM. THE VISIT IS SEEN AS AN ATTEMPT TO PATCH UP BADLY STRAINED RELATIONS BETWEEN THE CHRISTIAN/RIGHTISTS AND DAMASCUS. (CONFIDENTIAL)

4. ISRAEL. FOLLOWING AN EXPLANATION BY ATTORNEY GENERAL AHARON BARAK OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL OBSTACLES TO PRIME MINISTER RABIN'S RELINQUISHING OFFICE, RABIN HAS REPORTEDLY DECIDED TO REMAIN AS HEAD OF THE CARETAKER GOVERNMENT. THE LEGAL AND POLITICAL RAMIFICATIONS OF HIS DECISION WAS TO HAVE BEEN DISCUSSED AT YESTERDAY'S CABINET MEETING. IT IS NOT CLEAR, HOWEVER, WHETHER THE CABINET'S APPROVAL WILL BE NECESSARY OR EVEN WHETHER RABIN'S DECISION IS FINAL.

5. MEANWHILE, EMBASSY TEL AVIV NOTES THAT SHIMON PERES IS REPORTEDLY ANNOYED AT THIS APPARENT CHANGE IN RABIN'S INTENTIONS, BELIEVING THAT A WAY COULD HAVE BEEN FOUND FOR RABIN TO RELINQUISH HIS RESPONSIBILITIES AND DUTIES IF HE HAD SO WANTED. HE IS SAID TO FEEL THAT WITH RABIN REMAINING NOMINALLY IN CHARGE, HE (PERES) WILL BE HANDICAPPED IN BUILDING AN IMAGE OF LEADERSHIP.

6. THE LABOR PARTY'S CENTRAL COMMITTEE APPROVAL OF LABOR'S RANK-ORDERED KNESSET LIST ON APRIL 11 IS HEADED BY PERES, ALLON, AND EBAN IN THAT ORDER. MOSHE DAYAN IS A SURPRISING SEVENTH. FOUR OUT OF THE FIRST TEN NAMES ON THE LIST, AND 20 OF THE FIRST 40, ARE SAID
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TO BE PERES' PEOPLE, ACCORDING TO LOCAL OBSERVERS. IN A DISPLAY OF HIS NEWLY BESTOWED LEADERSHIP, PERES RAMMED THE LIST QUICKLY THROUGH THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE, OVERRIDING DEMANDS FOR A SECRET BALLOT.

7. THE EMBASSY ESTIMATES THAT THE SUDDEN AND UNEXPECTED CHANGE FROM RABIN TO PERES HAS DONE LITTLE TO HARM THE ELECTORAL CHANCES OF THE LABOR PARTY AND MAY EVEN HAVE SLIGHTLY IMPROVED ITS PROSPECTS. ITS ASSESSMENTS NOTES THAT PERES' OBVIOUS TALENTS AS A POLITICIAN AND, PARADOXICALLY, HIS IMAGE OF BEING LESS A PART OF THE "ESTABLISHMENT" THAN RABIN COMBINE TO GIVE THE PARTY AN APPARENT NET ADVANTAGE. THE PARTY'S SMOOTH TRANSFER OF POWER ENABLES IT TO MOVE QUICKLY TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF PERES' QUALITIES AS IT ENTERS THE ACTIVE CAMPAIGN. (CONFIDENTIAL)

8. SYRIA-JORDAN. THE JORDANIAN-SYRIAN RELATIONSHIP SEEMS TO HAVE COOLED CONSIDERABLY SINCE FEBRUARY, AND COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS HAS BEEN GREATLY

REDUCED. DESPITE THESE SETBACKS, WE WOULD EXPECT DISCUSSIONS OF FORMAL POLITICAL TIES TO CONTINUE AT A SLOW PACE. THE NEED THAT SYRIA FELT TO MOVE QUICKLY TOWARD A CLOSER ALLIANCE HAS LESSENED NOW THAT ASAD HAS ENDED HIS ISOLATION IN THE ARAB WORLD. MOREOVER, SYRIA IS LINKED AT LEAST ON PAPER WITH THE SUDAN AND EGYPT, AS WELL AS JORDAN, AND THEREFORE DOES NOT ATTACH AS MUCH IMPORTANCE OR URGENCY TO CULTIVATING THE JORDANIAN TIE.

9. THE NATIONALISTIC POLITICAL OUTLOOK OF THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT IN AMMAN ALSO PROVIDES A BRAKE ON A JORDANIAN-SYRIAN FEDERATION. DAMASCUS MAY BE SOMEWHAT PEEVED AT CONTINUING EAST BANK OPPOSITION TO JORDANIAN-SYRIAN POLITICAL UNION. THE CONSERVATIVE AND TRADITIONALIST EAST BANK JORDANIAN LEADERS ARE ANXIOUS TO PRESERVE JORDANIAN AUTONOMY AND TO RESTRICT AMMAN'S ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AND TO CONCENTRATE ON INTERNAL
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